# What's in a name?

# What's in a name? Mapping the terrain of informal institutions and gender politics

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Institutionalist scholars of most hues – including feminist institutionalists (FI) – increasingly confer equal status on informal and formal institutions as factors explaining political outcomes. However, as Georgina Waylen outlines in Chapter 1 of this volume, to date the specific nature and influence of informal rules, norms and practices – and the effect of interactions between the formal and informal – have been under-theorized and underplayed in empirical studies in both gendered and non-gendered institutionalist analyses in political science. These trends are slowly changing as comparative scholars – including FI researchers – turn their attention to informal institutions for explaining differences in political life, and political outcomes included comparative analyses of the global North and South (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Bjarnegård 2013; Piscopo 2016). This chapter seeks to support these crucial efforts to incorporate formal and informal institutional analyses into feminist political science (FPS) generally, and feminist institutionalism specifically, by laying out some of the foundational concepts and approaches regarding informal institutions in particular, and identifying the contours of key research developments in the area.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, feminist scholars in particular have been unable to ignore the informal in their examination of political life. A central insight of FPS is that the 'dynamics of institutional power relations, resistance, reproduction, continuity

and change need to be filtered through a gendered lens' (Mackay 2004, 113; see also Chappell 2006; Kenny 2007). Informal gender institutions – including masculine and feminine norms, and daily gendered practices that maintain hierarchies of status and domination, and reproduce expectations about 'appropriate' men's and women's capacities, behaviour and duties – are central to shaping political processes and outcomes, including who has access to political power and to material and symbolic resources. The challenge for researchers is that these rules are often taken for granted – usually submerged and barely visible – and are therefore difficult to study. Finding the right methods to 'see' informal institutions is essential, especially as it is through these rules, norms and practices that wider particular arrangements and power asymmetries are naturalized and institutionalized, and sometimes resisted and discarded, across institutional arenas.

In this chapter we argue that in order to extend the range and analytical leverage of FI in particular, and FPS in general, the necessary next stage of our work is to develop a common vocabulary of gendered institutionalist analysis, and to more systematically specify and operationalize key concepts, including the notion of an informal institution itself. We accept that this is no easy task: the wider institutionalist literature is fraught with definitional disputes and, 'the operationalization of institutionalist concepts is frustratingly vague or surprisingly flexible' (Lowndes 2014, 685). Indeed, we acknowledge our own struggles over time to clarify these slippery concepts, and accept that our position may provoke disagreement. We concur with Vivien Lowndes that FI should seize the opportunity – and take up the challenge – to produce greater conceptual clarity and more careful operationalization of key concepts (Peters 2012, 53; Lowndes

2014, 685). However, in attempting to contribute to this task here, we nonetheless retain our commitment to empirical complexity and the need to capture the 'messiness' of real world scenarios, and do so in the knowledge that parsimonious models often obscure rather than illuminate gender.

In working towards greater clarity about informal institutions and their relationship to gender politics, this chapter sets out to answer four core questions:

1. What are informal institutions and how do they differ from, and interact with, formal institutions?
2. What is the relationship between gender and informal institutions?
3. How do institutions, actors and networks differ? (Or, in other words, what is and is not an institution?)
4. How do we research informal institutions in order to capture their gendered nature and effects?

Ultimately, in addressing these questions, we hope to be able to contribute to strengthening FI's ability to build and test theory, and to consolidate the rich empirical findings and theoretical insights emerging from feminist scholarship investigating the interactions between formal and informal institutions in a variety of arenas. We also seek to draw some boundaries around FI and be clear about what its distinguishing features are vis-à-vis other feminist approaches. This includes, first, making a distinction between the roles of institutions and actors in shaping political and policy outcomes, starting with the assumption that institutions are likely to *matter as much if not more* than anything else in

explaining the determinants of political life. Second, suggesting that contests over the political rules of the game are fundamentally about power, and that power is gendered.

# What is an informal institution, and how do they differ and interact with formal institutions?

Institutions, it is generally agreed, are 'relatively enduring features of political and social life (rules, norms and procedures) that structure behavior and cannot be changed easily or instantaneously' (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 4). They are, at a minimum, 'systems of rules that work together to coordinate social [and political] behavior' (Raymond et al. 2014, 198). While accepting these broad definitions, institutionalists take different positions on the specific features, operations and effects of institutions, including on the key definitional questions of what constitutes formal and informal institutions. Some perceive formal and informal as existing on a continuum, and measured in gradations (see Raymond et al. 2014, 198). In this view, the formal is an outgrowth or crystallization of the informal, existing on a spectrum from taboos and customs through to written constitutions (North 1990, 46). For Olsen, 'evolving behavioural patterns are "frozen" into habits and traditions, and formally codified' (Olsen 2009, 6). Others see the relationship more dichotomously, conceiving the two as mirrors of each other (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Whichever view is adopted, as Waylen (2014a, 213) suggests, 'informal institutions cannot be looked at in isolation or as separate – they must be analyzed alongside any formal institutions that they are linked to and with which they interact'.

Institutionalist scholar Vivien Lowndes is one who argues against a 'strict separation between informal and formal rules or prejudging their relative significance' (2014, 687–8) preferring to use Ostrom's term 'rules-in-use'. Rules-in-use are defined as the distinctive ensemble of 'dos and don'ts that one learns on the ground' (Ostrom 2005, 38; Lowndes 2014, 688), which are a mix of the formal and informal, and which express 'institutional linkages across political and nonpolitical domains' (Lowndes 2014, 688). But we suggest, before one can understand what are the rules-in-use, there is a prior task which is to excavate and identify the nature of formal and informal institutions in order to specify which informal elements comprise the gendered rules-in-use. Only then can we analyse how the informal and formal institutions interact; how actors deploy the mix; and, what the gendered outcomes are of these arrangements.

Formal institutions are generally understood as being consciously designed and clearly specified (Lowndes and Wilson 2003), and disseminated and enforced through official channels (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Formal rules are identifiable though codes of conduct, contracts, procedures, policies and laws, for example. Although this seems relatively settled, there is a surprising uncertainty around what is (not) a formal institution among political scientists. While there is not space in this chapter for a full discussion, we think this fuzziness arises from the dissonance between common sense and holistic understandings of *political* institutions (as bureaucracies, executives, legislatures, political parties etc.) and the commitment to disaggregated and differentiated conceptions of institutions within institutional analysis as: 'sets of rules that exist 'within' and 'between' organizations, "as well as under, over and around them"' (Fox and Miller 1995, 92; Lowndes 2010, 67). This second conceptualization can be counter-intuitive;

indeed highly disaggregated understandings of political institutions can also reduce our ability to speak with comparative scholars. For the most part, we think the use of 'institutional arenas' – for example, the Westminster parliament as an institutional arena – works well as a means to bridge understandings of political institutions across conventional and institutionalist accounts. We do not suggest that either conceptualization is right or wrong, but we do think there will always be a need to clearly specify how we are conceptualizing and using political institutions in any given context.

Whatever the definition of formal institutions is used, we can accept that they are distinguished by being official, visible and codified. They are also distinguished by their enforcement mechanisms, including through legal recognition and regulation, by the power of the state or other official sources. In contrast, informal institutional rules are often 'hidden from view', tacit and undocumented (Lauth 2000; Helmke and Levitsky 2004) and enforced through unofficial sanctions, including shunning, social ostracism and violence (Grzymala-Busse 2010, 313; Waylen 2014a, 214), or indeed through positive rewards (see Chappell and Galea, this volume). Informal institutions usually operate through more opaque means – especially norms, practices and narratives (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Lowndes and Roberts 2013). For political scientists Julia Azari and Jennifer Smith (2012, 39), informal institutions exist 'when shared expectations outside the official rules of the game structure political behaviour'.

While it is important to differentiate between formal and informal rules, it is also necessary to distinguish between informal rules and other patterns of behaviour lest informal institutions become a 'catch all', and analytically powerless. They need to be distinguished from those norms that are more cultural in nature, such as raising an

umbrella when it rains (Azari and Smith 2012) or removing a coat in a restaurant (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 727). For Lowndes (2014, 686), informal political institutional rules are distinct from such personal habits or 'rules of thumb' in that they are specific to a particular political or governmental setting; recognized by actors (if not always adhered to); collective (rather than personal) in their effect; subject to some sort of third-party enforcement (formal or informal); and able to be described and explained to the researcher. Not all institutionalists would agree with every element of Lowndes' definition – again highlighting the challenge of pinning down these concepts. For instance, we would argue that the recognition/description element may not always be evident. Gendered institutions in particular – such as the timing of political meetings which make it impossible for carers to participate, or careers built on the presumption of a 'stay at home wife' – are often not recognized, especially by those institutional actors who are advantaged by them, at least until they are called out.

Refining current definitions, we would argue that informal institutions are distinguished by the following traits:

- *Enduring* rules, norms and practices that shape *collective behaviour* that *may or may not be recognized by institutional actors*;
- Have a *collective effect;*
- Are usually *not codified;*
- Are *enforced* through sanctions and rewards from *within or outwith* an institutional arena;

As with formal institutions, informal institutions perform a variety of functions. The informal can work to 'weaken, substitute for, or work in parallel with', formal institutions (Radnitz 2011, 352). Actors can employ informal rules to *undermine* formal rules to bring about change (see Hinojosa this volume) or to *maintain* the status quo against attempts at reform (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Informal institutions can also distort and stymie formal institutions (Levitsky and Slater 2011). Informal institutions can fill in the gaps where formal institutions are incomplete, operate as 'a second best strategy' when it is difficult to change formal institutions, or allow actors to pursue goals not publicly acceptable including unpopular or illegal activities (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 730; Azari and Smith 2012, 41). As Helmke and Levistky (2006, 3) note, the interaction between formal and informal institutions leads to 'myriad, complex and often unexpected effects: whereas some informal rules compete with and subvert democratic institutions, others complement and even help sustain them'.

A general point of agreement about informal institutions is that because of their submerged nature, their gradual evolution and embeddedness in organizational operations makes them very 'sticky' and difficult to shift (Lauth 2000); they have, as North notes, a 'tenacious survival ability' (1990, 45). But this is not to argue that institutions are impervious to change. Working through the 'constructive' gaps that emerge between formal and informal rules, actors can shift existing informal institutions (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, Sheingate 2010; Waylen 2014a; Chappell 2016), or indeed create new ones through layering, conversation and other methods (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). As Raymond et al. (2014, 198) discussed, informal institutions, operating via norms, can bring about change and transformation of existing institutional arrangements, due to their

'ambiguity and malleability'. While much of this change is understood to occur incrementally, sometimes change can occur rapidly, for instance informal rules can shift abruptly when changes in formal rules 'create incentives for actors to modify or abandon the informal rule' (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 732).

FI also agree that formal and informal 'rules of the game' exist, that each has defining features, as well as interaction effects which shape political and policy outcomes.

# What is the relationship between gender and informal institutions?

A key contribution of feminist institutionalism (FI) to institutional analysis is to bring a gendered perspective to the field. Its first important intervention has been to show that formal and informal political institutions *are gendered* – in that they are normatively organized around stereotypes about men's and women's attributes, experiences and abilities, and symbolically valorize masculine traits, especially hegemonic ones, over feminine ones. As such, they embody and reproduce particular patterns of status and domination. The second intervention is to reveal the *gender effects* of rules, norms and practices, including on access to and distribution of political power and resources, on political and policy outcomes, and on political change. Here we unpack the relationship between gender and (informal) institutions along three axes: gendered institutional logics, particularly logics of appropriateness; gender and power; and gender and change including the significance of the gendered environment.

# Gendered institutional logics

Institutional logics provide the organizing principles, vocabularies of motivation and action, and the overall framework of sense-making in a particular institutional arena (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). While rational choice institutionalists have typically focused upon instrumental logics – based upon calculus and the weighing up of consequences – following the groundbreaking work of March and Olsen (1989, 161), new institutionalism has placed great emphasis on informal institutions as creating institutional 'logics of appropriateness'. In a manner analogous with Ostrom's rules-in-use, institutional logics comprise the combination of formal and informal rules and practices which comprise the 'world view' of actors in a particular institutional arena, and which constrain some forms of agency while encouraging others: 'institutional logics are embodied in practices, sustained and reproduced by cultural assumptions, and political struggles' (Thornton and Ocasio 2008, 101). Although this logic is not impermeable, it is difficult to unsettle as it is perpetuated by institutional actors who 'embody and reflect existing norms and beliefs' (McAdam and Scott 2005, 15) and who seek to maintain the rules.

FI have drawn on this concept of institutional logics of appropriateness to explore how institutional rules, norms and practices operate to create a specific 'gendered logic of appropriateness' (see Stivers 2002; Chappell 2006). Their work points to the way political arenas such as parliaments and executives are structured by gender-biased assumptions and 'dispositions' that underpin their operation (Mackay and Waylen 2009; Annesley and Gains 2010; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011;

Bjarnegård 2013; Kenny 2013). Formal rules can contribute to a logic of appropriateness – for instance, through instantiating overtly discriminatory rules that ban women from participating in certain professions – such as frontline soldiers – or by disallowing their engagement in political activities – such as denying female enfranchisement. However, more commonly, and working more subtly, are informal rules and norms which influence this logic, especially the masculine and feminine codes of appropriate behaviour that undergird institutional processes. These gender norms are present in all institutional settings, but the balance between them can shift according to the context. In political, bureaucratic and legal settings, a hegemonic masculine ideal – representing rationality, strength and toughness – tends to be 'culturally exalted' (Connell 2000, 84): these are the symbolic codes that shape institutional 'ways of valuing things, ways of behaving, and ways of being' (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995, 20). The antithesis is femininity – represented by traits of passivity, nature, care, emotion and irrationality – which tend to be devalued in political life.

Gendered institutional logics have two key effects. First, they prescribe (as well as proscribe) 'acceptable' masculine and feminine forms of behaviour within institutional arenas. At the heart of gendered logics of appropriateness in political life is the coding of public authority, and political presence and agency as culturally masculine. Because men tend to be associated with masculine codes and women with feminine ones, the gendered logic of appropriateness maintains dominant categories of men in powerful positions and keeps women (and men from marginalized categories) in the role of the 'other', viewed as 'space invaders' (Puwar 2004) in the political realm. Elin Bjarnegård's work on homosocial capital demonstrates this point, showing how masculine privilege accrues

capital and pays political dividends, through political networks founded on 'sameness' or homosociality (2013). Second, these logics influence political outcomes. The policies, legislation, and rulings that are the outcome of political institutional processes are imbued with gender norms through exposure to the logic of appropriateness: these in turn help to (re)produce broader social and political gender expectations, including for instance the contours of the welfare state (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999), and women's political participation (Hern 2016). These are what Gains and Lowndes (2014) call 'rules with gender effects', as opposed to 'rules about gender' such as parental leave, equal pay or anti-gender discrimination policies.

Feminists interested in exploring these gendered logics have been careful to point out that they do not present in the same way in all institutional settings. As Lovenduski's important foundational work in this area argued, institutions have distinctively gendered cultures and are involved in processes of producing and reproducing gender in different ways (1998, 348). What we know from comparative work on gender and various institutional settings – including parliaments (Childs 2004; Mackay 2014a) electoral systems (Krook et al. 2006), bureaucracies and women's policy agencies (Stetson and Mazur 1995; Chappell 2002; Stivers 2002) executives (Annesley, Beckwith and Franceschet 2015) and political parties (Kenny 2011, 2013; Bjarngård and Kenny 2015; Kenny and Verge 2016) – is that the gendered logic of appropriateness is complex and plays out differently in similar institutions in different polities and different institutions within the same polity. Taking this area of research forward requires being attentive to these differences and asking questions about how, where and why gendered logics of

appropriateness differ across institutional settings, and what difference this makes to gendered political outcomes.

# Gender, informal institutions and power

Understanding the gendered nature of political institutions provides tools for understanding how political power is constructed, how it functions, and how it might be reconfigured. This insight rests upon the claim of feminist social science – including feminist political scientists – that gender is one of the principal means by which power operates by normalizing and naturalizing asymmetries. As V. Spike Peterson argues: gender invokes 'a deeply internalised and naturalised binary – the dimorphism of "sex difference" – which is then available to naturalize diverse forms of structural oppression' (2015, 178). Thus gender power naturalizes masculine advantage, 'setting the terms of normal, just, and proper arrangements for political and social power' (Duerst-Lahti 2008, 165) and enhancing the legitimacy, status and power of already powerful groups, while doing 'the political work of making the limited options and precarious lives of subordinated groups seem somehow inevitable rather than unconscionable' (Peterson 2015, 178).

This naturalization has not occurred through a conscious strategy on behalf of all men to dominate all women. As Hooper argues: 'men gain access to power and privilege not by virtue of their anatomy but through their cultural association with masculinity' (2001, 41). Men's access to power has been reinforced over time through 'constantly repeated processes of exclusion' of women (Lovenduski 2005, 50), and through organizational rules, routines, policies and discourses that have rendered 'women, along

with their needs and interests, invisible' (Acker 1992, 567; Hawkesworth 2005, 147). Concepts of gender power thus allow us to expose and explain why seemingly neutral rules can result in outcomes that profoundly disadvantage women (and marginalized groups of men) and also the way in which institutions – as gender regimes (Connell 2002) – reinforce the status quo.

The concept of gender regimes, developed by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (2002), is widely referenced within FI as part of a repertoire of gendered frameworks (see, for example, Lovenduski 2011; Chappell and Waylen 2013). Gender regimes, developed in organizational analysis, provide a framework of interconnecting institutions that comprise the overall pattern of gender arrangements in a formal institutional arena, such as a legislature, a state bureaucracy, a judiciary or a political party. A gender regime involves four dimensions: a gendered division of labour; gendered relations of power (including the way in which control, authority or force is organized along gendered dimensions); gendered patterning of emotions and emotional labour; and gendered culture and symbolism (including cultural scripts about gender difference, prevailing gender norms etc.) (Connell 2002, 53–58). Each dimension is the sum of previous and ongoing gender contestations. The dimensions will include formal elements but predominantly will comprise informal rules, norms and practices.

Paying attention to gender regimes in a specific institutional setting makes visible the asymmetry of institutional power relations (Kenny 2007, 96) and makes us look at how particular combinations of formal rules, informal norms and everyday practices play out, underpinned by specific narratives, and with what effects. For example, local variation in gender patterns may create ambiguities and contradictions that open up

spaces for contestation and change, as well as providing rich resources for resistance. Gender regimes are highly influential as concepts, but examples of systematic application are rarer and it will be a key task of FI to systematically apply and develop gender regimes as part of wider theory building processes.

# Gender, informal institutions and change

The overtly 'feminist', normative, aspect of feminist institutionalism is most apparent in its concern to better understand how existing formal, but more importantly informal, institutions can be disrupted to bring about greater gender equal political outcomes, in terms of representation, recognition and redistribution (Mackay 2008 Chappell 2016). Theoretically, acknowledging the existence of a gender regime provides insights into the power dimension of political institutions; it also points to a potential mechanism of change. As Karen Beckwith notes, if institutions *are* gendered, they surely can be *regendered*, including in ways that disrupt current patterns of power and inequality (2005). Recent research has shown that the effect of informal institutions in bringing about change is not predictable. They can in some instances play a reinforcing role, maintaining the gender status quo, but they can also be transformative in regendering political processes and outcomes.

The weight of extant FI scholarship on informal institutions points towards informal rules acting to preserve the gender status quo, or gendered logic of appropriateness, in the face of reform efforts, including reform where there has been the creation of new formal rules and policy frameworks. Attention has been paid to the role of the informal in instances where the formal rules have changed, for example to promote

gender equality and address gender injustice, but where implementation is patchy and outcomes are negligible in terms of positive change, such as in the area of gender quota subversion (see Piscopo 2015; Verge and Espírito-Santo 2016). Informal mechanisms of resistance and contestation include 'forgetting' new rules and norms and 'remembering' the old, including the reassertion of traditional gender norms (Leach and Lowndes 2007; Mackay 2014a). Research has demonstrated how actors draw upon informal institutions to underpin strategies of partial or non-compliance, for example Chappell's (2016) work on the International Criminal Court, which highlights how judicial interpretations that uphold 'gender norms that treat women's rights as less significant than other rights'. Further, work on political recruitment (Kenny 2013) – highlights how informally sanctioned rule-breaking, lack of rule enforcement and adoption of alternative conventions – has thwarted the implementation of policies aimed at increasing women's entry into politics.

As Azari and Smith note, it is important that informal institutions are characterized not only as 'historic hang-overs' and not always as negative, but also as sometimes positive and creative outcomes of contemporary institutional dilemmas (Azari and Smith 2012, 49) As such, attention in FI research is increasingly being drawn towards identifying how informal institutions can engender change (Waylen 2014a; Chappell 2016) and towards theorizing how political arenas may be regendered (in a positive direction) through the mobilization of informal rules and norms. The work of Beyler and Annesley (2011) on regendering aspects of the welfare state; Jennifer Piscopo (this volume) on using informal rules and norms to strengthen gender quotas in Mexico, and in Sweden and France (Friedenvall and Krook 2011); Leigh Raymond et al (2014) on

shifting norms to develop anti-violence against women policies and Annesley et al (2015) on the incorporation of gender equality in Cabinet appointment processes are all cases in point. We agree with Walyen (2014, 214) that 'this new emphasis on the potential dynamism and mutability of informal institutions can make a significant contribution to the burgeoning discussions of the interaction of formal and informal institutions in institutional change'.

Given the congealed, embedded and often unrecognized nature of informal gender norms, practices and rules, future researchers are encouraged not (only) to search for major instances of change – the 'punctuated equilibria' many historical institutionalist might look for – but to pay attention to micro-shifts that occur within an institutional arena (see Chappell 2016 as an example). In undertaking an FI analysis, we suggest it is important to pay attention to the 'small wins' that may well add up over time to a significant institutional transformation (see Chappell and Mackay 2015; Chappell 2016, Chapter 7). We also suggest that researchers pay more attention to the 'constructive ambiguities' (Oosterveld 2014; Chappell 2016) embedded in formal rules – which we have found in our work on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2016) and the operational rules of UN Women (Mackay 2013) – can provide the gaps through which informal rules can operate- sometime to advance progressive gender justice interpretations, although sometimes also in the opposite direction.

# What is *not* an informal institution? Actors and networks

An area of some ambiguity in both the general and FI literature is the relationship between institutions, actors and networks, and what is *not* an informal institution. This is important because to elide actors or networks and other phenomena with informal institutions muddles analysis and runs the danger of making informal institutions a residual category. In this section, we discuss the distinction we see between these entities in order to provide some greater analytical precision to our understanding of these relationships.

In entering this territory, we are aware that we are travelling towards one of the fundamental debates in the social sciences – the distinction between agency and structure – and the attendant ontological and epistemological considerations this brings (for a detailed discussion on structure and agency see Hay 2002). For the purposes of this discussion, we simply want to point out that as FI we consider institutions – which sit somewhere on the structural side of the explanatory continuum – as having a primary or more significant role compared to actors and agency, for understanding political life. In adopting this position, we do not suggest that agency and actors are unimportant, to the contrary; rather, our position is that institutional forces will always mediate the influence of actors on political outcomes to a greater or lesser degree, and in some cases the relationship will be co-constitutive. However, even where actors and institutions are conceived as co-constitutive, it is still necessary to be able to distinguish between the characteristics, mechanisms and effects of institutions on political phenomena from the actors who interpret, interact with, shape and are shaped by these institutions.

In some institutionalist literature, including the feminist variant, actors and agencies have an ambiguous presence. Sometimes they are not mentioned at all, with a

sense that institutions magically appear and are then monitored, enforced and maintained as if by phantoms. Other times, actors lurk in the background, without a clear sense of the interaction between the rule 'maker' or 'taker' on institutional design or implementation. In other instances, it seems like actors rather than institutions are doing all the work, with no clear sense of what is 'institutionalist' at all about the analysis. We take our position on actors from John Campbell (2004, 72) who suggests that 'institutions enable, empower and constitute actors by providing them with the principles and practices that they can use to modify existing institutional arrangements.' But also agree with him that actors do not have unimpeded agency because 'institutions also act as constraints by limiting the number of possible innovations that they [actors] can envision and make'. This chimes with Mahoney and Thelen's view (2010, 28) that '[institutional] rules influence the particular type of actors that will emerge and thrive in any context, and the extent of reform possible'. We see actors then as having a critical role in shaping the nature, operations and effects of institutions, but in turn the features and context of institutional settings act to constrain the capacity of actors to design, bend and interpret the rules of the game – and ultimately, can limit their capacity to influence outcomes.

Institutions constrain actors, but that is not all they do. We also agree, in line with Ostrom, and with Lowndes and Roberts (2013, 94), that institutions can be permissive – more or less so depending on the context – providing spaces for 'rule breaking and shaping' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013, 90). The 'creative agents' able to take advantage of these opening can be the elites who sit at the top organizational hierarchies, but equally, they can be actors who exist at the base of the pyramid, who can adapt and resist rules, and sometimes force changes in the status quo (Lowndes and Roberts 2013, 105).

Identifying those contexts where external and non-elite actors can resist and bend the rules is especially important for those scholars seeking to understand the mechanisms that drive change in gendered institutions where masculine power is entrenched. Feminist scholars including FI scholars have often paid attention not just to political power brokers who may appear to set the rules, but also those grass-roots actors, social movements and lowly ranked individuals who refuse to play by the rules, whether formal or informal, and through their resistance promote disruption and change. Francesca Gains and Vivien Lowndes (2014, 528) remind us that in identifying the actors who make, interpret, enforce and resist the rules, we also need to pay attention to their gender attributes. As they note: 'Actors occupy male or female (or transexual) bodies, their values and attitudes reflect different positions on a masculine/feminine spectrum, and they hold different perspectives on the gender power balance and possibilities for change (in the context of intersectional identities)'.

Another area of uncertainty in institutionalist accounts is the place of networks. Research on institutions and networks has proceeded on largely separate trajectories over the past few decades. The former is more associated with work in organizational and political sociology, and the latter associated with economic sociology (Owen-Smith and Powell 2008). Like informal institutions (Gryzmala-Busse 2010), networks often arise to fill the space of incomplete institutions and to enable collective action in conditions of uncertainty (Schoenman 2014). Some authors argue they are co-constitutive (Owen-Smith and Powell 2008), but even if this is the case, we agree with Azari and Smith (2014, 40), among others, that networks are *not* institutions. It is more useful perhaps to see networks as an intermediate variable: to conceive of them as vehicles for actor

engagement, and a key means to transmit and circulate ideas and practices, rather than as institutions themselves. Networks of actors instantiate institutions through daily practices, and through the deployment, contestation and subversion of formal and informal rules and norms. Networks are *groups of actors*, whereas institutions are the rules, norms and practices which set the context within which networks operate. Networks may *deploy* informal institutions; they may be the *carriers* of institutional effects (Owen-Smith and Powell 2008, 595); and network relations may *shape* trajectories of institutional development (Clemens 1993; Schoenman 2014) but they are not institutions in, and of, themselves.

In empirical FI examples, networks (particularly homosocial networks) are often the key carriers of informal institutions, such as clientelism (Bjarnegård 2013); networks also provide actors with the resources to resist and subvert formal rule changes, such as gender quotas (see, for example, Piscopo (this volume)), although there are also instances of women's networks created for the purposes of promoting gender reforms (see Nazneen (this volume)). To move FI scholarship forward, we need more work that further unpicks and unpacks the relationships between gendered actors, including networks, and formal and informal institutions. We need analyses that pay closer to attention to which (gendered) actors get to make the rules, under what conditions are they able to resist the rules, and to what ends. We also need closer examination of the work networks do in carrying the demands of collective actors into institutional settings and the resources these networks provide for challenging the old and instituting new formal and informal rules, norms and practices (see Verge and Claveria and Culhane in this volume as a starting point of these efforts).

# How do we research informal institutions?

Methodologically, it is a challenge for FI to identify 'the complex matrix of rules' (Lowndes 2014, 687), intersecting institutions and causal mechanisms and arrangements that produce gendered effects – particularly the reproduction of masculine dominance – in political life. While not underestimating the methodological challenges of capturing and analysing informal institutions, we concur with Azari and Smith (2012, 49) that 'informal rules can be identified with reasonable precision, observed in the world, and distinguished from other sources of patterned behavior, including strategic self-interest and the operation of formal rules'. For FI, undertaking a gendered analysis of any institutional arena requires three steps: the first step requires an analysis of the mix of the formal and informal 'rules-in-use', the next step is to identify what gendered logic, if any, underpins these rules, and then, finally, to consider their gendered effects and outcomes. Different scholars have experimented with a variety of tools in their efforts to pin down the various formal and informal institutions at play in any context, and to identify their patterns and effects. We outline a few of these here, but do not suggest these are the only techniques that can or should be used.

In line with much historical institutionalist literature, much FI scholarship has adopted a comparative approach, looking across two or more cases to identify similarities and differences in institutional settings and the effect of these on gendered political outcomes. Chappell (2002), Krook (2009) and Waylen (2007, 2014b) are all examples of such an approach. In these comparative studies – and also in single case studies (see, for example, Kenny 2013) – within-case and cross-case analysis is undertaken using

qualitative methods such as theory-driven process, tracing using documents and interview transcripts (Kenny 2013; Waylen 2014b). Rosemary Grey's (2015) important study of prosecutorial discretion at the International Criminal Court is an interesting legal version of this approach, scrutinizing Court transcripts and other key documents to excavate gendered path dependencies across time (for a discussion of other legal methods see O'Rouke 2014).

Challenging long-held feminist prejudices about the value of quantitative methods for studying institutions, Laurel Weldon (2014) has recently provided a convincing account of their value, in a mixed-methods framework. For Weldon, quantitative methods can never replace the rich, detailed accounts provided through qualitative methods, but they can help in bringing greater clarity to the 'mushy, amorphous and shifting' (Weldon 2014, 662) contexts in which formal and informal institutions operate. Weldon identifies three core advantages in using statistical techniques:

> (1) the ability to summarize large quantities of information that are difficult to eyeball or summarize using traditional qualitative tools, (2) the ability to estimate the degree to which observed relationships can be attributed to chance, and (3) the ability to parse the degree to which different factors shape outcomes of interest. . . Cross-national comparisons also offer a greater ability to denaturalize local social practices (particularly useful to feminists seeking to critique male dominance).

A good example of the value of a mixed-methods approach to the study of informal institutions is found in Bjarnegård's work (2013, 2015), including her use of statistical techniques alongside interviews and observations to demonstrate how informal party

recruitment criteria such as an emphasis on family connections are connected with a higher representation of women in Asian politics. Verge and Claveria (in this volume; see also Claveria and Verge 2015) provide another example of mixed-methods approaches, using a combination of quantitative data and synthetic literature reviews to uncover common patterns and possible causal mechanisms in secondary data.

A third and increasingly common method applied to the study of political institutions and gender is systematic in-depth ethnographies (for a discussion see Radnitz 2011, 365–6; Chappell and Waylen 2013; Smith 2005). Ethnographic studies of parliaments are emerging (see Crewe 2014; also see Childs 2016) alongside political recruitment practices (Bjarnegård 2013), while Mackay's work on UN Women (2013, 2014b) highlights its value for understanding global institutions. In this volume, Chappell and Galea discuss the value of 'rapid' ethnography for identifying and understanding the gendered actors and effects of various enforcement mechanisms in the male-dominated realm of the Australian construction industry. Ethnographic work, while certainly important, can only be one strategy among many. Research findings have to be triangulated with other forms of data, for example with policy documents, rule books and reports, to help maintain a balance between actors and their institutional context.

# Conclusion

In this chapter we argue that in order to extend the range and analytical leverage of feminist institutionalism, the next essential stage of our work is to develop a common vocabulary of gendered institutionalist analysis, and to more systematically specify and

operationalize key concepts. Refining current definitions, we would argue that informal institutions are distinguished by the following traits: *enduring* rules, norms and practices that shape *collective behaviour* that *may or may not be recognized by institutional actors*; have a *collective effect*; are usually *not codified*; and are enforced through sanctions and rewards from *within or outwith* an institutional arena.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, feminist scholars have been unable to ignore the informal in their examination of political life. Informal gender institutions are central to shaping political processes and outcomes, including who has access to political power and to material and symbolic resources. In real-life scenarios, there is a complex admixture of formal and informal, and we need to avoid overly strict separations between informal and formal rules, norms and practices or judging in advance their relative significance. As the emerging stock of FI cases indicate, and as demonstrated in this book, different configurations of formal and informal have different effects: sometimes formal and informal rules work together to maintain the gender status quo; at other times, the informal may compete, undermine or adapt formal rules in both positive and negative ways. How they play out will make a difference to opportunities for changes to the gender status quo and the existing gendered logic of appropriateness. We have argued that there is a prior task of excavating and identifying informal institutions to enable FI scholars to analyse how they interact with formal institutions, and with what gendered outcomes. Where are we now? We have identified a number of important informal institutions that interact with formal.

Not everything is an (gendered) institution. If we are not careful about drawing some definitional boundaries, informal institutions, in particular, run the risk of becoming

a residual category. We have argued that it is important to specify what is, and what is not, an informal institution. We see actors and networks as working in, through, and against institutions but as separate to them. To be sure, networks will be more or less formalized, more or less institutionalized, and can have *institutional effects*, but they are collectivities of *actors*, rather than being institutions themselves.

Studying informal institutions – their substantive characteristics and their gendered effects – requires the use of a variety of methods. We encourage a broad approach to the selection of methods, understanding that each provides a different insight and perspective to the multiple layered and often unpredictable processes and outcomes that institutions produce. We acknowledge that different methods will be more or less relevant depending on the temporal and contextual elements of the case at hand, and that researchers will need to be guided by these factors in their selection. One of the potential benefits of FI to the broader field of feminist political research is its methodological pluralism – the willingness of its adherents to engage with, test and extend mixed approaches to be able to gain insights into the gendered relations between formal and informal institutions, their reproductive mechanisms and effects.

What is in a name? A lot – and if we are to extend the reach of FI, we need to develop some core common language, and specification of concepts. Doing so is not easy: there is always a trade-off between empirical richness and the winnowing and simplification required to gain analytic purchase, and gender scholars are rightly cautious about parsimony given the messiness of gendered political life. But more careful specification is essential: it enables us to build and test theory and to consolidate the empirical findings and theoretical insights of the growing body of FI work that addresses

the interactions between formal and informal institutions. In other words it enables FI scholars to speak to ourselves and to others. Our argument is that FI can remain a big tent, but should not serve merely as a flag of convenience.

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